

Real Instrument Sound Generators

These ROMplers and physical modellers offer a huge range of traditional instruments or synthesised realistic-sounding patches



AAS Chromaphone 2 \$199

Applied Acoustics Systems are the big guns of physical modelling, and struck instruments are the focus of Chromaphone 2 (VST/AU/AAX), meaning there are mallets, percussion, keys, basses, bells and more. The sounds are realistic and mix-ready, for a touch of grounding organic matter in the most eclectic electronic jam. In the Edit tab you get LFO and Enveloper, a Noise Generator, Mallet type and a Mixer to balance those parts of the sound you're crafting. Next, two Resonators (String, Beam, Marimba et al) massage the sound waves even more. The onboard effects sound great, and the arpeggiator helps you put it all together and audition the sounds you're tweaking with minimal effort. A playable, realistic instrument that lets you go as deep as you want.

www.applied-acoustics.com

VERDICT 9.2



Native Instruments Reaktor Prism £59

It's a synth, but not as we know it. Running in NI's Reaktor or the free Reaktor Player, Prism uses 'Exciters' rather than oscillators. These signals are then fed into the Modal Bank, a system of resonating filters that chew up the sound in a lifelike way. A modulation envelope and LFO help get the sounds moving, and there are five effects to finish things off. As long as you can get used to its innovative architecture, Prism is capable of generating a diverse array of familiar yet somehow otherworldly sounds, and it does so in a highly different but inspiring and intuitive way, fitting the best of both worlds into one synth.

www.native-instruments.com

VERDICT 9.1

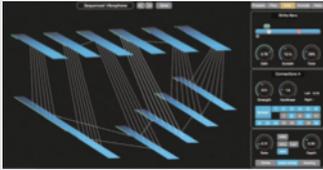


Steinberg HALion Sonic 3 £214

Taking in a variety of keys, strings, percussion and 'ethnic' instruments among others, HALion Sonic 3 is a lower-rank version of the full HALion 6, removing the advanced sample editing features from the bargain, basically. These sampled instruments are clear, precise and very hard to fault. Patches also have basic 'macro'-style editing as well as advanced tweaks and effects, and with sequencing built in too, HALion can be a complete workstation. That workstation element means that there are plenty of sound expansions to the HALion universe, but the price is fairly hefty in comparison to similar offerings.

www.steinberg.net

VERDICT 8.8



Physical Audio PA3 Derailer £159

To do its thing, this plugin models metal bars and (non-linear) springs, and the sympathetic resonances between them. This leads to an alarming number of parameters and connections to get your hands on, although the Edit tab has friendlier controls, with Sustain, Tone, striking mass, end-clamping and such.

The sounds you get from Derailer are realistic, sure, but considering the vast complexity of the software itself, they feel far too samey, with little variation. As a plugin, it's a bit sloppy, too, with manual installation of presets, only three playable MIDI octaves for some setups, and some parameter tweaks stopping held notes. Derailer PA3 isn't about immediacy – changes are needed for the creative musician – but avid physical modellers are well-served. www.physicalaudio.co.uk

VERDICT 6.8

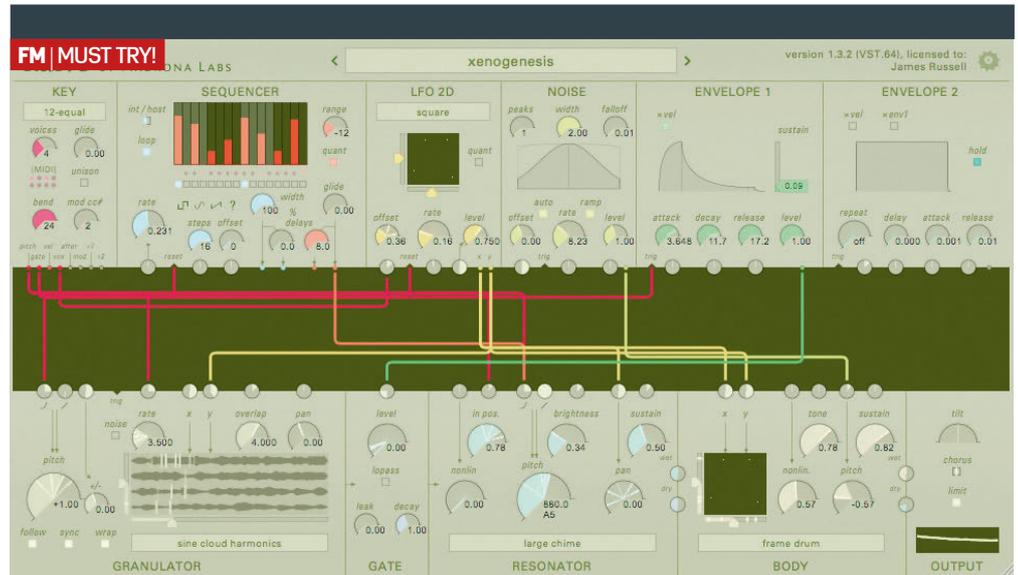


Native Instruments Kontakt 5 £339

You may well already have Kontakt or the free Kontakt Player installed on your hard drive. With its Factory library offering orchestral, world and vintage tones, Kontakt 5 is a dab hand at whipping up real instrument sounds. It's when you start searching through the world of (sometimes free) third-party sample libraries, however, that Kontakt becomes even more powerful. And that's without even mentioning its immense feature set as a sampler. This does mean that it doesn't come cheap, though, and while it's frequently updated, we still feel it's owed an interface and useability upgrade. V6, anyone?

www.native-instruments.com

VERDICT 8.7



Madrona Labs Kaivo \$129

A patchable, semimodular physical modelling synth (VST/AU), Kaivo is another entry that brings otherworldly sounds to the fore, albeit tones that smack of reality. With its patch-cable workflow encompassing 2D LFO, Sequencer, sample Granulator, Resonator and more, this synth is a toolkit ripe for experimentation, inspiring a different way of doing things, and conjuring a huge palette of sounds as a result. And that palette is, simply put, incredible. Rarely does a plugin come along that offers genuinely new sonic territory to explore, but Kaivo's diversity and profundity blow us away. The one drawback (though maybe a creative boon for some) is Kaivo's learning curve – but we suggest scrambling up this as soon as humanly possible, because for both realistic and out-of-this-world tones, Kaivo's a no-brainer.

www.madronalabs.com

VERDICT 9.4